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Dr. *S T I N T O N*'s

S E R M O N

Preached before the *HONOURABLE*

HOUSE of *COMMONS*.

Lunæ, 1 Die Februarii, 1768.

O R D E R E D,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Dr. *Stinton*, for the Sermon preached by him on Saturday last before this House, at Saint *Margaret's, Westminster*, and that he be desired to print the same; and that Lord *Brownlow Bertie* and Mr. *Amcotts* do acquaint him therewith.

T. T Y R W H I T T,
Cl. Dom. Com.

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S E R M O N

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Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

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ST. MARGARET's, WESTMINSTER,

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SATURDAY, JANUARY XXX, 1768.

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GEORGE STINTON, D. D.

Chancellor of the Church of LINCOLN, and Chaplain to his
Grace the Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

L O N D O N:

Printed by J. HUGHs, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields;
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Oxford; and Mr. THORN, at Exeter.

M DCC LXVIII.

SEERMON

Preached before the Honourable

HOUSE OF COMMONS

AT

St MARGARET'S CHURCH

ON SATURDAY JANUARY 17TH 1791

BY

GEORGE BENTLEY

Chaplain of the Chapel of Lincoln and Captain in the
First or Foot Battalion of the 1st Regiment

LONDON

Printed by J. B. G. and J. B. G.

At the Sign of the Crown, in Pall Mall

1791

TITUS iii. i.

PUT THEM IN MIND TO BE SUBJECT TO PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS, TO OBEY MAGISTRATES, TO BE READY TO EVERY GOOD WORK.



THE principal light, in which christianity teaches us to consider human life, is that of a state of trial and preparation for another world. We are, in its account, only *strangers and pilgrims upon earth* : we are therefore admonished *to desire a better country, that is, an heavenly* ; and instructed *so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal*. But the happiness of his creatures, in every period of their being, is an object to the great Father of all : and accordingly, the religion, which he has established, extends its care also to the behaviour of men in their social

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capacity, upon which their comfortable subsistence here so greatly depends. The actual occasions of the institution of civil governments have probably been very various ; but the only end, that could be openly avowed or justly aimed at, was the common interest of all. The general inclination of men to act up to the full extent of natural power, to govern themselves by their own arbitrary will, and to compel others to submit to it as far as they can, (a claim which they have always been too forward to assert in fact, however contrary to right,) would scarce be irrevocably given up, till its inconveniences had been severely felt, and its loss could be amply compensated by the acquisition of security and peace. Even after its being resigned by consent, when societies were formed, it has all along continued to be so tempting an object, that the history of most nations is little else than an account of their endeavours to exercise it upon others, or to ward it off from themselves ; that is, of foreign wars, and intestine commotions. Of the former, few, in comparison, out of the many which have desolated the world, have been undertaken by *either* side, and none at all by *both*, out of mere necessity ; and the latter always take their rise from encroachments, which are prompted by an unreasonable love of power.

It is a melancholy thing to reflect, how large a portion of human misery may be distinctly traced up to these two sources ; and it might be expected, that this consideration should have some effect in mitigating the fury of ambition, and stopping its wild havoc. But men are so blinded to the calamities of war by the romantic ideas of glory, that the earth, upon every trivial occasion, is deluged, without remorse, in the blood of its inhabitants : and princes have so many temptations and so many means to trample upon the liberties of mankind, that a considerable majority of the human race has, in all ages, groaned under the oppressions of arbitrary power. Indeed these evils have so long prevailed in the world, that we usually acquiesce in them as matters of course ; and they are scarce considered as injuries even by those upon whom they fall.

It were well, if, in the few places where freedom has escaped the attempts which have been every where made to subvert it, the abuses of it were not a fresh source of calamity. But the same unhappy aversion to being restrained themselves, and the same desire of tyrannizing over others, which can reconcile nations to all the horrors of war, and prompt rulers to the destruction of civil liberty, is perpetually exciting subjects to aim at a freedom from all controul, and to throw off even those salutary restraints, which

prevent their suffering, no less than their committing, of injuries. And yet, where-ever authority is exercised in subservience to the ends of its institution, the duty of obedience is enforced by immediate and obvious interest: nor, even where there is real cause of complaint, does it often happen, that affairs are administered in a manner so totally inconsistent with public good, but that prudence may find its account in submitting to what cannot be remedied without introducing worse confusion. But popular madness is too apt to slight these inferior regards; and there is apparent need to call in additional assistance from motives of duty to God, and from the awful sanctions of religion.

THE scripture has amply supplied this want, by enforcing submission to magistrates in the most express terms, by ascribing the origin of their power to the Sovereign Lord of all, and by representing every violation of their authority as being ultimately an attempt against his. * *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.*

* Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

† *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.*

IN what hands the supreme power should be lodged, is left to every community to determine by its own laws ; and what exceptions there may be to the general duty of obedience, can be pointed out only by the nature of each constitution, and the manifest inconsistency of the oppressions alledged, with the end of all government. The obligation itself is always delivered in scripture in general terms ; and the apostle, in the text, aware of the disposition of mankind to evade or forget what they do not like to practise, adds a command to Titus, to be assiduous in inculcating upon his converts this important duty ; to *put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work* ; that is, every outward act of obedience which might testify their dutiful submission to authority, for attaining the ends of its institution.

It was intended, that the preachers of the gospel should counterbalance, if possible, by the frequency of their pre-

† 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.

cepts, the aversion men have to the doctrine: and indeed, the circumstances of that time made repeated admonitions upon this head peculiarly proper: for had any degree of the turbulent humour and seditious doctrines of the Jews been communicated by them to the primitive christians, it would have drawn down deservedly upon them the indignation of the Roman power; too apt, without this resemblance, to confound them both under one common name. But the behaviour of men, in every age, may convince us, that this was no temporary precept, adapted to particular exigences, but is of perpetual and universal use. And more especially to us of this nation, if the whole world be not mistaken in our character, no opportunity of inculcating obedience to magistrates can ever be thought superfluous. That wild scene of uproar and confusion, which produced the atrocious deed of this day, and the subsequent state of alternate anarchy and despotism, has been thought worth recalling to our minds, by the solemnities of a national humiliation: and, as long as the institution continues, there would be strange imprudence in resolving to reap no benefit from it; besides that there is a direct mockery of religion in assembling to deplore guilt, if none is supposed to have been contracted. Length of time may well be allowed to cool the passions which this event once excited: but, notwithstanding

standing the great indifference with which it is now too generally regarded, there are still grounds to assert,

THAT it deserved to be delivered down to posterity as a subject of public humiliation ; and

THAT many beneficial consequences will be derived from a religious observance of the appointment.

It is but natural to expect, that different opinions will be formed concerning the precise measure of guilt which is to be assigned to the several parties engaged in these transactions : but it must be no common degree of prejudice which can affirm any one to have been entirely innocent. The regal claims of power were manifestly inconsistent with a free constitution, and justly gave the alarm to its legal guardians. The public indeed had acquiesced under these claims, during times of greater simplicity ; and when all the vigour, which the executive branch of the government could be enabled to exert, was but barely sufficient, in one reign, to deliver the nation from foreign tyranny and superstition ; and, in another, to resist the formidable attempts that were made to bring it again under the same yoke. But the disposition of mens minds was now changed : the principles of freedom were more diffused, and better understood,

understood, and the former necessity was no more. It was time to make a distinction between temporary expedience and permanent right; and to shew that no prescription can abolish those essential privileges of human nature, which every favourable opportunity of recovering, is also, of course, a just one.

BUT the spirit of liberty, which originally gave birth to the opposition, which inspired its first leaders, which made their proceedings justifiable, and even their conduct prudent and temperate, degenerated at length into faction. There was a period, when all past grievances were redressed, and the crown had given every security against future abuses of its power, except one; the having no power to abuse. But, by this time, the spirit of discord was gone forth. Mens minds had been too much heated in the contest, to recollect with coolness, with what views they first engaged in it. They seem to have even acquired, which is no uncommon case, a certain wilful and determinate resolution not to be convinced or set right. The republican spirit, imported from countries where it suited the established form of government both in church and state, to one where it was incompatible with both, had long been secretly lurking and gaining ground in the nation, and now shewed itself in its full strength. A suspicion of insincere compliances, and
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fears for their personal safety, might naturally discourage some from being forward in promoting an accommodation : but the remorseless ambition of many unquestionably impelled them to seek their own greatness through all the horrors of a civil war. There were but few, even of the more moderate popular leaders, who possessed themselves sufficiently to see, in time, the gradual, but obvious change of the spirit they had helped to excite ; and fewer still who had the courage to tread back the steps they had taken, and join that side to which justice had manifestly gone over. The rest were hurried away by the torrent to do and to suffer their part in a scene, which, for the singularity of some of its circumstances, has hitherto had no parallel in the annals of any age or nation.

THE sacred name of religion has, indeed, upon other occasions, been heard amidst the din of arms. It has been sometimes necessary to defend its rights, by repelling force with force. Enthusiasm, a mistaken, but, generally, an honestly mistaken, kind of it, has often excited civil commotions. A pretended zeal for its interests has been an usual shelter for knavery to carry on its designs with less suspicion. But hypocrisy and fanaticism ; that is, a formal intention to deceive, and a real persuasion of acting at the same time by divine direction, are seldom found together.

gether. There seems to be little less than a contradiction between them. But they were now shewn to be perfectly consistent : at least, there is no comprehending the principal characters of this time, particularly one, the most distinguished of them all, without supposing them to be a compound of real enthusiasm, as well as real knavery. The consequence was such as might be expected from all the warmth and impetuosity of the former quality, united to the dark, unfeeling policy of the latter. The destruction of our religious constitution was effected with a degree of fury, which would scarce have been pardonable, had it been employed in the extirpation of pagan idolatry. Nor did the preservation of civil liberty long continue to be the object of its pretended patrons. The establishment of their own power upon the ruins of the monarchy was soon apparently their end ; and lawless violence the means of accomplishing it. The very forms of the constitution were annihilated, and a military force possessed itself of all the authority of the state. The whole was completed by an enormous act of mere power ; which, in a moral view, admits of no estimate ; in a political one, was precisely the same, as if all the members of either of the other branches of the legislature had been massacred after the formalities of a mock trial.

THE government being thus subverted, all the confusion ensued, which the absurd, impracticable projects of some, encouraged by the artful and interested views of others, were naturally calculated to produce : till, at length, harassed with wars and factions, and glad to enjoy repose upon any terms, the nation was contented to submit to the arbitrary rule of one man, who had laid the foundation of his greatness in the destruction of all legal, and then possessed himself of all illegal, power : whose government was only more eligible than mere anarchy : and whose enormities are less abhorred than they deserve to be, on account of the vigour and firmness of his administration, and particularly for his having gratified the national pride, by insulting the other nations of Europe, after he had enslaved his own.

WHEN this fit of frenzy was over, and men grew cool enough to be ashamed of and to undo what they had done, it was natural to express their regret for the guilt into which they had been hurried : it was generous to warn their posterity against being involved in the like : it was pious to deprecate the wrath of heaven, which they could not but know they had deserved : and a permanent national humiliation could alone answer these important ends. All indeed had not equal, but all had sufficient, guilt to deplore.

plore. The royalists had made the first attempts against the constitution : it was greatly injured by the republicans and puritans : and it was completely ruined by a fanatical army, impelled to every kind of lawless violence by a daring and enthusiastic leader. Nor was the moral character of the contending parties more unexceptionable than their civil conduct. The hypocritical grimace of the one was justly detested by the other : but that other, less disposed to imitate the excellent example of the king, than to be, at all events, unlike his enemies, was too generally distinguished by the opposite extreme of immorality and profaneness. The execrable act, which finished the destruction of all rightful authority, was conducted with such a perfect contempt both for forms of law, and principles of justice ; and yet was so tamely suffered, even by those who were most averse to it, to be carried into execution ; that it was justly considered as a common and national crime, in which almost every one had his share of guilt.

It had been no wonder, if so painful a review had made our ancestors unwilling to perpetuate this disgrace of their times by calling it forth from the common events of history, where it might have slept unnoticed by thousands, and would gradually have become only a matter of speculation to the curious. But they saw that it afforded instruction

struction to all ranks of men ; and they sacrificed their own fame to the interests of succeeding generations. It is, in truth, of great importance to the public, that all should have the history of their species fairly laid open before them, as far as it is likely to furnish them with right principles of conduct in their several stations ; that they may learn from hence, that connection between civil causes and effects, in which reason is a very imperfect, and experience too late an instructress. But the vulgar, who are always the great instrument in disturbing and subverting governments, have no means of acquiring this political prudence, or of being guarded against the arts of intriguing demagogues, but these public commemorations.

SUCH institutions may indeed be abused, and this eminently has been, to very different purposes. They may serve to perpetuate, instead of extinguishing, a bitter, factious spirit ; and be made a vehicle for party-rage and narrow prejudices, instead of helping to diffuse a liberal, candid, and dispassionate turn of mind. But every other kind of public instruction is equally liable to be perverted. The majority must take their religious no less than their political principles, in some degree, upon trust ; and the guilt of those, who abuse this helpless confidence reposed in them,

them, can be equalled only by the folly of such as would abolish the sole means of information afforded to so large a part of mankind.

BUT the subject before us can scarce be so perversely managed, but it will recommend at least one useful precept ; that of dutiful submission to authority : and till the doctrines of liberty shall be less crudely and injudiciously taught among us ; till they shall cease to be the more greedily imbibed, as they approach nearer to licentiousness ; till their effects shall become less visible in a general proneness to turbulence and riot ; the community cannot suffer much by having its members annually reminded of this almost antiquated duty.

BUT the circumstance, in this commemoration, which gives most offence, and provokes a smile of contempt from those who affect to be superior to vulgar prejudices, is the supposition which our present humiliation implies, that any guilt, or effect of guilt, can, at this distance of time, remain upon the nation, and our praying that it may not be visited upon us or our posterity.

IF indeed the idea of guilt were necessarily limited to personal transgressions only, and God never displayed his justice but in the punishments of a future life, it might be hard to justify our being now assembled together. But the prophetic parts of scripture abound with denunciations of vengeance against national guilt, as such : the historical parts acquaint us with the execution of these threats in periods far remote from the commission of the sin : the present condition of more than one ancient nation is an apparent proof of the consequences of God's anger still remaining on them : and, besides many other dreadful effects of the sin we now lament, which long remained on these nations, the grievous animosities and divisions propagated down from it even to the present time, are very sad and threatening ones. Indeed, if Providence does at all interfere in the concerns of this world, and what we call the general course of nature is to be ascribed to a superior being acting with uniformity and constancy, it is plain, that nations, as well as individuals, though, in one sense, they are the artificers of their own fortune ; yet, in another, and a most awful one, they derive it from the appointment of God. Their behaviour and their actions are their own ; but it is a higher power that has annexed to them their proper fruits : and on him it depends how long they shall

be produced. Whether God is perpetually interposing his agency, or contrived and executed at once his own plan in the government of the world, makes no difference in the case before us. His interposition is equally real, his government equally perfect: and the prosperity or adversity, whether immediate or remote, which, by the established constitution of things, societies bring upon themselves, must be considered in no other light than as rewards or punishments inflicted by the hand of God.

Now the faults which originally marked the factions that this unhappy period created and has perpetuated among us, are obvious to all who are not themselves infected with the contagion. A concurrence in political sentiments is observed to be frequently attended with a similarity of moral character: and thus, the wrong behaviour of former ages is entailed upon their latest posterity, instead of being an admonition to amendment. But the serious review of a story so full of instructive events, has a natural tendency to efface these unhappy stains. It will mitigate that high spirit, which, though the usual attendant upon liberty, and perhaps its best protection, is always in danger of being hurried into fatal violences. It will repress that factious temper, which is so apt to invent imaginary, and to in-
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same real, grievances. It will dispose men to be thankful for the blessings they enjoy, and not be forward to set things afloat, upon romantic hopes of their settling again in some better form. And it will also admonish rulers, not to affect more greatness or higher prerogatives than are really for the good of their people ; nor make any attempts against that constitution which happily emerged at length out of this chaos of faction, and has since been improved by another auspicious event, to a degree of perfection, which theory can scarce exceed, and fact has never equalled.

IN whatever measure the diffusion of these principles is promoted by the present solemnity, (and it is our own fault if it be not greatly promoted thereby,) it may so far be considered as taking away the guilt of the nation, and exempting it from punishment, by way of natural consequence. But what absurdity can there be in going still farther ? where is the superstition of supposing, that the humiliation of a whole people, assembled to acknowledge the supreme authority of God, to profess their entire dependence upon his providence, to deplore their own and their forefathers' sins, and to excite in themselves a more affecting and practical sense of the important truths of religion,

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ligion, may avert even those judicial calamities, which might otherwise be inflicted by the more immediate interposition of heaven?

THE truth is, it argues a light and frivolous turn of mind to affect to throw contempt upon an institution so replete with lessons of religious and civil prudence; and which, by a strange singularity of circumstances, illustrates the fatal effects of almost every wayward passion that has, in any age, disturbed the repose of mankind: of princely tyranny, and popular licentiousness: of superstitious bigotry, and wild fanaticism: of open dissoluteness, and secret hypocrisy: of piety perverted to rebellion, and liberty introducing slavery.

THE conclusion is, that we take care the example be not lost upon us: that we watch, with all diligence, over the workings of these passions in our own bosoms, and preserve inviolate that admirable form of government which has made such provision against their bursting out to the disturbance of church or state: that we reflect how natural it is for some persons to be struck with the dangers to which liberty is exposed from the encroachments of regal ambition, while others are more affected with the instances

instances of its being lost by the unruliness of the people ; and how unavoidably the fears of each must determine their judgments with regard to the proper distribution of power in a free constitution : that, since party-differences will subsist, we learn to make some allowance for the prejudices of our fellow-subjects, instead of expecting that all should submit to our own : in short, that we behave, one to another, with all that humanity and benevolence which become partakers of the same nature, professors of the same religion, and members of the same community.

F I N I S.



